

About New York

Salmagundi Club Soon to Decide Fate of Its Storied Lower 5th Avenue Quarters

By MEYER BERGER

THE fate of the last high-stoop building in lower Fifth Avenue, the 101-year-old Irad Hawley Mansion at No. 47, will be decided within the month by the 680 members of the Salmagundi Club, which quarters there.

Salmagundi is one of the oldest artists clubs in the world and the inclination of artists is toward sentiment for old things and old places, but there are business men in the club, too; business men who paint on the side, and they may vote for progress.

The club can spend \$50,000 to \$75,000 to remove the broad old brownstone stoop and to close in the ancient four-story stairwell; make other changes to meet existing fire laws, yet keep the old Washington Square atmosphere.

If the vote goes the other way, the Hawley Mansion will come down and, with adjoining properties, may be replaced by a \$1,500,000 apartment house. That is the trend, anyway. It killed the Mark Twain House and the old Brevoort, among other places just above the Square.

If the moderns win, Salmagundi will hole up for a while, probably in the National Arts Club in Gramercy Square, then come back to modern marble and cold chrome when the apartment house is done. If that's the way it is to be, something lovely will die—something mellow and warm and friendly.

For Salmagundi was born in the warm and mellow tradition. It started one fall Saturday night in 1871, in John Scott Hartley's cluttered art studio under a skylight at 596 Broadway, above Prince Street, as the Salmagundi Sketch Club.

It was a lusty crowd of rowdy-dow intellectuals who painted, quaffed deeply and worked off animal excess after fried-sausage-and-coffee feasts by impromptu boxing and wrestling bouts that always ended in panting laughter, never in anger.

The founders, the Villagers their day, were great artists Hartley, Howard Pyle, A. B.

Frost, William M. Chase, Stanford White, George Inness Jr., W. A. Rogers, Edwin A. Abbey, among others. Writers belonged even then, and business men, too.

The club owns one of the best art libraries in existence. Its art collections are priceless; its art auctions famous. If the club votes to save the old place, the proceeds of auctions to be held Jan. 20, 27 and Feb. 3 would go toward a fund for doing over the smoky old quarters with their sixteen apartments for resident and transient guests.

Henri Laussucq, Salmagundi president, a Basque who won the Silver Star at 61 by heroic parachute jumps in World War II, seems to move with the sentimentalists, but withholds comment. The oldest members, men over, or totiching 90, would be saddened by change. Even the Salmagundi Toast speaks for the old, rather than for the new:

Old Friends and new who gather here,
May kindly thoughts and friendly cheer
Pervade our feasts and warm our hearts.
May we play fair in all the parts
That life assigns. May art, not pelf,
Be boss, and Justice stand upon the shelf.

In 1893 the club moved to 14 West Twelfth Street. John Rogers, whose family-group sculptures got into almost every home in America, had worked there. The Salmagundians had a roof garden that looked down on the Square and on lovely neighborhood gardens. They filled the nights with laughter and song.

They took over 47 Fifth Avenue in 1917; burned the mortgage five years later. They filled it with the rich works of members, with smoke and with the clinging odor of good ale. They played billiards endlessly, have always had a good dining hall with waitresses who never seem to leave, or fade. And they, who were the Village wild ones in youth, are the Village conservatives now.

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